

Speak Week Report 2023



Cardiff Students' Union Undeb Myfyrwyr Cardydd

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Introduction

Speak Week is an annual campaign, run by Cardiff Students' Union, where students are given the opportunity to provide feedback on changes that they want to see at Cardiff University. In line with the previous year, (2021 – 2022), this year's campaign (2022 – 2023) took place over two separate weeks: Speak Week 1 and Speak Week 2.

During Speak Week 1, which occurred from Monday 21 November – Friday 25 November 2022, the Students' Union was across campus encouraging as many students as possible to provide feedback about their student experience. Students were asked: 'If you ran the University, what would you keep and what would you change?' Students could answer via the online survey, or by filling out a physical Speak Week card on campus.

Speak Week 2, which ran from Monday 30 January – Friday 3 February 2023, aimed to further delve into some of the issues raised from the initial data collection, taking place through paid focus groups – on the Cost-of-Living Crisis, and the Impact of Strike Action – to provide more qualitative feedback.

Like last year, students were also asked to respond to an additional Likert scale question. With the five options of 'strongly disagree,' 'disagree,' 'neither agree nor disagree,' 'agree,' and 'strongly agree,' students were asked 'to what extent do you agree with the following statement: "The Students' Union has had a positive impact on my student life".'

Due to campus-wide strikes by academic staff on Thursday 24 and Friday 25 November, there was a significantly reduced student presence on campus, affecting the outcome of the data collection. On Thursday 24 November, the decision was made to end Speak Week 1's data collection, resulting in a lower number of comments received from students. To supplement the two days of collection lost, two additional days of data collection were consequently added to Speak Week 2. Thus, Speak Week 2 took the format of an initial two days of data collection on Monday 30 and Tuesday 31 January 2023 and two days of focus groups on Thursday 2 and Friday 3 February.



In total, 3,255 Speak Week cards were collected with 5,998 individual comments, comprising of 2,875 'keep' comments and 3,123 'change' comments. In addition, four paid, hour-long focus groups were run – two on the Cost-of-Living Crisis and two on the Impact of Strike Action.

This report will be divided into three main sections. The primary section will analyse the data collected in Speak Week 1, the second will analyse the data collected in Speak Week 2, and the third will examine the Focus Groups which were ran in Speak Week 2.



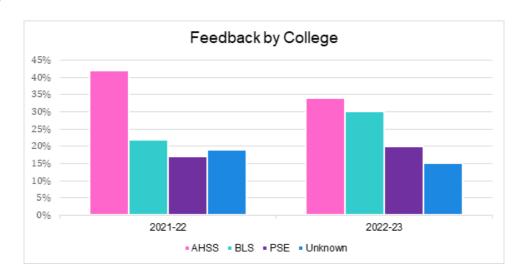
Speak Week 1

Despite the interruption during Speak Week 1's data collection, 2320 Speak Week cards were still collected. The following section will provide insight into the comments collected from November 2022.

Demographic Information

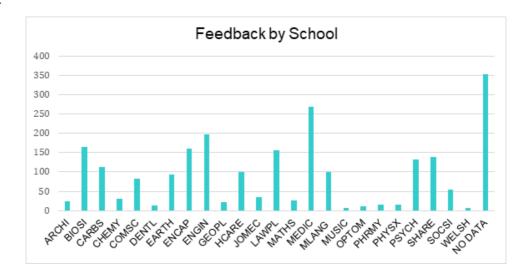
Graph 1 and Graph 2 show the college and schools with the most students providing feedback.

Graph 1:



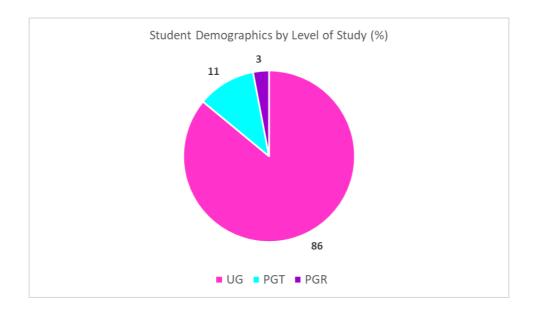
Efforts were made this year to reach students from a wider range of subject areas. Graph 1 demonstrates that the percentage of comments being left by College of Biomedical and Life Sciences (BLS) and College of Physical Sciences and Engineering (PSE) students rose from last year's data collection. This year's data collection, by percentage, is representative of the size of each College.

Graph 2:



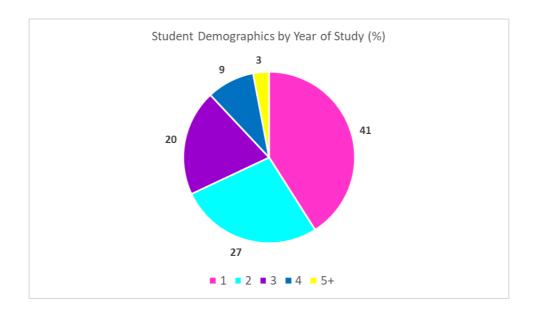
Although all schools were targeted, there were noticeably low response rates from some of the smaller schools, and those who do not necessarily engage consistently with the Students' Union. The response rate from MEDIC and SHARE was particularly high in comparison to previous years. The high response rate from schools such as ENGIN and BIOSI can also be attributed to school staff who are notably supportive of such Students' Union activity, and who were engaged with this year's campaign.

Graph 3:

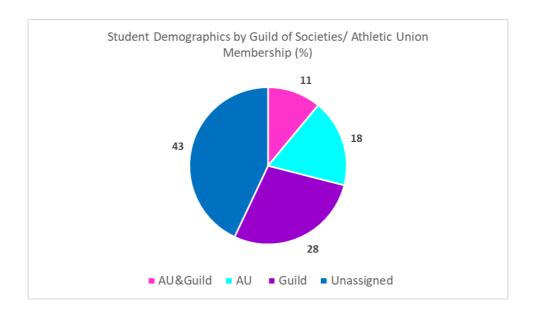


Student Demographic by Level of Study [Undergraduate=86%; Postgraduate Taught=11%; Postgraduate Research=3%]

Graph 4:



Graph 5:



Of the Speak Week cards returned, 57% were returned by students who were either a member of the Guild of Societies or the Athletic Union, or both (as of 18 May 2023, there were 5,193 AU Members and 8,495 Guild Members). Whilst this figure is an unrepresentative figure of students at Cardiff University, it is unsurprising that students from these groups have responded highly. Students who belong to these groups are already engaged in Students' Union activities and are thus more likely to engage in Speak Week, as they may be around campus for their activities and may be more aware of the activity that we are running, too. The reason for the jump in responses from last year, which saw 40% of Speak Week cards returned by students who were either a member of the Guild of Societies or the Athletic Union, or both, is unclear. It could be related, in part, to strike action, with students who had commitments to clubs and societies more likely to stay in Cardiff, when others may have gone to their non-Cardiff addresses.

There were a number of incentives for various student groups that may have supported engagement with the campaign. These were for:

- 1. Sports clubs and societies, with the respective society and sports club that returned the most cards receiving £100 for their society or sports club.
- 2. Student Academic Reps (SAR), with the respective SAR that returned the most cards receiving £100 in Students' Union vouchers.
- 3. Individual students, with one student who provided a feedback comment receiving a reward of £100 in Students' Union vouchers, chosen at random.



Main Themes

Speak Week data was processed as individual comments, which allowed multiple comments on one card to be categorised under more than one theme as necessary. Data was analysed in two different ways.

1. Compiling the comments by school and producing a school summary.

Comments were also categorized by school, to allow academic university staff to view data that was relevant to their students. Summaries of the data were provided and sent to key contacts within each school, with the option to view the raw data on request. All school summaries are compiled in Appendix 1.

2. Compiling and analysing the comments by theme

Speak Week reports from previous years have used pre-determined themes through which to categorise data. However, this year, the themes have been led by the data itself, with each theme being included because it was significant in this year's dataset. This provides a more accurate picture of the prevalent themes being raised by current students. All data was processed and analysed by the Student Voice team. A breakdown of the key themes is included below.

Analysis of the Speak Week 1 data identified five main themes. The following themes received a particularly high number of responses:

- 1. Campus and Facilities (University) 1024 Comments
- 2. Students' Union 691 comments
- 3. Academic 413 comments
- 4. Student Support 346 comments
- 5. Cost of Living 289 comments



Some of these themes have more individual sub-themes than others. For example, the theme of Campus and Facilities is very broad and contains significant sub-themes, such as study spaces. This is similar for the themes of Students' Union and Academic, whereas the themes of Study Support and Cost of Living are more specific. It is particularly notable that there were 289 comments on the cost of living. This is a new theme that has not appeared in previous Speak Week reports, unlike the other four themes, representing the current economic climate and its impact on students at Cardiff University.

Campus and Facilities

The theme of Campus and Facilities covers a wide range of mainly physical areas, such as accommodation, libraries, cafés, etc. The primary sub-theme is Study Spaces.

Study Spaces

There were 272 comments on Study Spaces in Speak Week 1, which is nearly as many as the number of comments on the Cost of Living (289), showing its significance to students. Many comments were indeed positive, with students praising the Centre for Student Life (CSL) and the Students' Union Lounge space in particular. Yet, most comments focused on the need for more space to study, in addition to upgrades in existing study spaces, namely more plug sockets to charge laptops. Students also wanted to see opening hours for study spaces extended, especially in more school-specific areas. School-specific study spaces proved popular, although many feel that these areas should have food and drink making facilities, such as kettles and microwaves. Some students suggested that study spaces should have cards on the table to say that the space next to someone is available, in order to maximise capacity in study spaces.

University Buildings and Libraries



Feedback demonstrated appreciation for university cafés, often as an alternative form of study space. Café facilities were generally well received, with most comments wanting to see more of the existing provision. This includes extended opening hours, additional options including vegetarian and vegan alternatives, and further food outlets at the Heath Park campus.

Similar to Study Spaces, there was significant feedback on university libraries, which received 153 comments in Speak Week 1. Students appreciate university libraries, in particular the 24-hour opening times and the friendly staff. However, many students suggested a need for the refurbishment of libraries and creating more 24-hour spaces.

In addition to libraries, students suggested that academic buildings should be refurbished and cleaned. There were also comments about the need for more inclusive designs, with fire doors being too heavy. Heating of buildings was also raised as an issue, with buildings from different schools either being too warm or too cold.

Accommodation and Transport

There were many comments relating to the sub-theme of accommodation. In particular, students suggested that maintenance reports should be taken more seriously, and that the laundry system is unsatisfactory and needs to be reviewed, with students providing criticisms on its cost and reliability.

The feedback also identified a need for better support for students after their first year with finding housing. Additionally, some students stated that specific accommodation for certain student groups (e.g., Welsh speakers) would be appreciated.

The university bus received positive feedback, but some students would like its service to be extended to the JOMEC building and to the Heath Park campus during key hours. Moreover, students want to see a discounted bus pass. The bike rental scheme received positive feedback from students, and they would like to see it continued. Other students who drive to university commented on the difficulty



of finding a space to park, and secondly on the price of parking.

Facilities

Facilities were another important sub-theme, receiving 279 comments in Speak Week 1. A number of suggestions were received about improving facilities, including bike lockers and more water fountains. There were also suggestions to modernise lab facilities and to maximise the use of underused spaces. Existing facilities are appreciated but students would like more. Additionally, students would like to see Wi-Fi connections improved around campus.

In general, feedback about Campus and Facilities was positive. However, the recuring theme is that students want to see more of what already exists, with many feeling that there is not enough for the current demand. They want to see longer opening hours, renovations, and more facilities.

Students' Union

Feedback from Speak Week 1 contained around 700 comments on the topic of the Students' Union. The largest sub-theme was events, which received over 300 comments.

Events

Students demonstrated appreciation for the events in the Students' Union building, such as 'Yolo' and 'Juice', and demonstrated appreciation for the wide range of other events that take place too. Much of the feedback showed the desire for an increased capacity at club nights, particularly 'Yolo'. Some students feel that club nights could be better organised with changes to the queuing and ticketing system, in addition to the introduction of an 'Ask for Angela' scheme.

Yet, whilst alcoholic events were received positively, there is a clear desire amongst many students



to see more non-alcoholic events take place. Suggestions for these events included more of what already exists, with students citing Students' Union campaigns such as 'The Big Unwind,' as well as career fairs, subject-related trips, and silent discos. Other suggestions included DIY or cooking lessons. Moreover, some students expressed an interest in more events targeted at specific groups, such as postgraduate or Welsh-language students, to be run.

However, existing Students' Union shops, as well as temporary fairs, such as the plant and poster sales that were run this year, received positive feedback. Above all, students left positive comments about the Students' Unions' 'Give It a Go' scheme, demonstrating an appreciation of the dates, duration, destinations, and the accessibility of the trips, with feedback showing students want to see more of the same opportunities.

Students' Union Opportunities

Students' Union sports clubs and societies are seen as great aspects of student life, with many appreciating the range on offer. Members of dance, karate, and archery clubs or societies did, however, comment on the need for more available space, with some suggesting that Y Plas could be used more by student groups. Moreover, some students felt that communication between the Students' Union and societies could be improved and that training sessions could be updated.

The Students' Union's communication via social media received praise, although communication via email was identified as an area for improvement, with some students saying that they were unsure how to join in with activities. Some also said that the university-run IMG leagues need to be reviewed, as members often feel unsupported.

Students' Union Building

Comments on the Students' Union building itself were largely positive. Spaces within the building, such as The Lounge, are appreciated. They appreciate the transparency of what happens in the



Students' Union and appreciate having an elected officer team to represent their interests. In general, students want to see the continuation and an increase of what already exists.

Academic

Compared to previous years, there was a much smaller number of students commenting on academic issues. In both of the Speak Week reports from 2021 and 2022, Academic was the primary theme. Yet, in Speak Week 1, it was only the third most popular theme. This theme looks at feedback on topics such as academic courses, lectures, assessments, and communication. In particular, the dominant sub-themes were lectures (134 comments) and assessments (99 comments).

Lectures

There were a lot of positive comments about lectures, including lecture content and support from lecturers. Students demonstrated appreciation for lecture recordings. However, some comments indicated that the recording of lectures was not consistent, and that lectures often started late and did not make the most of the time available.

Assessments

Online exams proved popular in the feedback. Other students, who had never sat in-person exams before, mentioned how they felt unprepared for their in-person exams and would like to have more support. Some students expressed dissatisfaction at not receiving feedback on time and others stated that they would like to receive more feedback. Comments demonstrated a concern from students who have multiple deadlines at the same time, and a wish to see them distributed better over time. The Extenuating Circumstances procedure received criticism, with students feeling that the policy needs to revert to two weeks, and that the appeals process should be quicker, so students do not need to resit assessments unnecessarily.



Academic Experience

There was a broad range of comments related to academic courses at Cardiff University. Students from a range of subject areas expressed a desire to have a university-wide reading week. Students who take part in compulsory placements stated that they would like to be paid for the work done on placement and indicated they would like more specific support while on placement. Some students who are Student Academic Representatives requested to have more ways to get involved to improve their academic experiences.

Moreover, many students provided comments wanting to see timetables released earlier, and some students expressed interest in having more, or easier channels to provide feedback. Comments received about Learning Central were mixed, with some students providing positive feedback, but others suggesting the system is difficult to navigate. Academic events run by schools received positive feedback, but students expressed a wish to see more events, such as external speakers, documentary screenings, and networking events.

Student Support

In Speak Week 1, there were 346 comments relating to Student Support. These comments covered sub themes such as employability support and wellbeing support.

Wellbeing

Feedback demonstrated that students feel that current services are valuable but not sufficiently supported for the number of students that need them. Many comments left by students indicated that waiting times are too long and that services can be difficult to access. Also, some students feel that some issues that can have a significant impact on student wellbeing, such as loneliness, are not seen



as serious issues by the University. Some feedback demonstrated that Heath Park students feel that they do not have access to the equal support that exists in Cathays.

Individual Support

Employability support is appreciated but students feel that more could be given. Some students suggested that they would appreciate more directed help with transferable skills, such as CV making, and the existing services should be better publicised. Moreover, greater support for ADHD and dyslexia tests would be appreciated. The existing support is generally greatly appreciated but it seems that students feel like there should be more. Students believe that student portals should be simplified, be more personal and supportive.

Students' Union

Regarding the Students' Union, therapy dogs are appreciated and so are the Cost-of-Living initiatives. However, students would like more support for the cost of living and believe that there is more that the Students' Union could do to improve safety after club nights, such as introducing a walk home scheme.

Comments suggested that current support services, including career services and academic support, are beneficial, but do not operate in an efficient enough way to meet student demand. Students also felt that such services need to be reviewed to make them more accessible and reliable for neurodiverse individuals. Other comments highlighted the need for improved safety measures for students on campus, especially after dark, and that student loneliness and isolation requires addressing.



Cost of Living

In Speak Week 1, there were 289 individual comments directly relating to the increased cost of living. Whilst in previous years students have commented on the cost of living, the volume of comments this year indicates a necessity for further attention. Comments on the cost of living ranged from placement costs, high fees, and a desire for discounted travel for students in Cardiff.

There was positive feedback on the Students' Union's actions to support students with the cost-of-living, namely free period products, £2 lunches, and the 'Feed Your Flat' scheme where students were able to pick up free items such as rice or washing-up liquid. However, some felt that the Students' Union could do more. The prices of facilities at Cardiff University are considered by some to be too expensive, including the use of the university gym and printers. Some comments suggested that free tea and coffee could be provided in libraries and study spaces. With regards to accommodation, there were 15 individual responses about the cost of laundry being too high. Moreover, students would like to see more financial support, such as bursaries.

To find out more about the impact of the cost of living on students and what can be done to support them, the decision was made to run focus groups on this topic in Speak Week 2.



Speak Week 2

Due to the industrial action in Speak Week 1 and its impact on data collection, the decision was made in Speak Week 2 to conduct two more days of data collection on Monday 30 and Tuesday 31 January 2023. Over the course of these two days, 935 Speak Week cards were returned, comprising of 784 'keep' comments and 830 'change' comments. This section will outline the differences between the two sets of data. In general, most of the feedback in Speak Week 2 was consistent with that of Speak Week 1. However, there were some key notable changes, including a significant focus on the strikes by academic staff at Cardiff University. Other notable areas included an increased percentage of comments on the cost of living and an increase in comments relating to timetabling. There was also a notable change in the reduction of comments asking for the Centre for Student Life opening hours to be extended, as this is something that had already been achieved prior to Speak Week 2. This segment of the report will also include a section on minority voices, about which the comments have been collected from both Speak Weeks.

This section will look at the themes of:

- 1. Strike Action 60 comments
- 2. Cost of Living 75 comments
- 3. Campus and Facilities 355 comments
- 4. Academic 497 comments
- 5. Minority Voices 87 comments

Strike Action

In total, there were 71 Speak Week cards with a comment on strike action, of which 60 came from Speak Week 2 (and 11 from Speak Week 1). With data collection taking place at the end of January, and with eighteen proposed days of strike action in February and March 2023, this is not unsurprising.



In practice, there were eleven days of strike action that took place, in addition to the three days that took place in November 2022 (Thursday 24, Friday 25 and Wednesday 30), totaling fourteen days in the 2022/2023 academic year. As evidenced by the increase in comments, many students were concerned by the upcoming strikes and their potential impact. However, feelings on the strike action were mixed.

On 6 December, at Cardiff Students' Union's Annual General Meeting, students passed a motion to side with the University and College Union (UCU) strikes, so it was not surprising that many Cardiff University students wanted to see their lecturers' demands met, meaning that they would not need to strike. Yet, there were still many students who displayed discontent for the disruption strikes were likely to cause, regardless of whether they supported the strikes or not. Speak Week 2 occurred at the start of the second phase of industrial action, and it is therefore likely that if it took place later, there would have been even more comments on the subject. Nevertheless, due to the significant rise in comments relating to strike action, the decision was made to run a second set of focus groups on strike action to find out more about the student perspective.

Cost of Living

The Cost-of-Living crisis has represented an enormous challenge to so many students, which is shown by their feedback across both Speak Week campaigns. There were a further 75 comments on the cost of living in Speak Week 2. However, there was a decrease in comments relating to the cost of living in Speak Week 2, which can probably be explained by the increase in Students' Union activity throughout term one, in addition to the growing focus on other issues.

Campus and Facilities

Feedback on Campus and Facilities in Speak Week 2 was very consistent with that of Speak Week 1. However, there was a notable increase in comments asking for longer opening hours in university



study spaces from Speak Week 1 to Speak Week 2, despite the extension of the Centre for Student Life's opening hours in January 2023. The increase in comments asking for longer opening hours between the two Speak Weeks potentially reflects the increasing demand for study spaces as the year progressed.

Academic

In Speak Week 2, there was an increase in the number of comments on this theme. At the beginning of the second semester, many students experienced problems receiving their timetable, with students noting lateness of delivery as well as problems with their reliability. The sub-theme of timetabling received 56 comments in Speak Week 1 and 84 in Speak Week 2, representing a significant increase.

The sub-theme of academic events also had a notable increase. The results suggest that as students engaged with academic events throughout the year, they wanted to be able to participate in more.

There were also increases in the number of comments referring to placements as well as the call for a university-wide reading week. With regards to placements, there was an increase in the number of comments, with students demanding greater autonomy, more support and reimbursement for the work done. Similarly, to placements, there was an increase in students asking for a reading week.



Minority Voices

The aim of this section is to provide insight into important issues at Cardiff University that may otherwise be missed due to the smaller number of comments that were received regarding them. This is to recognise that the number of comments received on a certain issue does not necessarily mean that the issue is more or less important than others, especially when relating to students from minority groups. In the examples below, students were identified as speaking on behalf of a minority group about an issue that directly impacts that group.

Two submissions identified the need to better tackle racism across campus, and there were three comments requesting a better representation of staff and students from ethnic minority groups at Cardiff University, including the need to address the pay gap.

There were three comments asking for the better provision of Halal food in the Students' Union, as well as an increase in clarity over what is and is not Halal. There were four comments in total relating to better accommodation for religious prayers. These included students asking for a prayer room on the Heath Park campus, as well as space for students who are Hindu, to light a naked flame. It was also requested that timetables should be more mindfully scheduled for Muslim prayer times.

There were seven comments relating to the Welsh language. This included increasing the number of Welsh lessons on campus as well as updating the Cardiff University logo to feature the Welsh text on top.

Ten students commented on the need for the provision of gender-neutral toilets, mostly by students at the School of Biosciences. It was also asked that period products were supplied in all bathrooms across campus.

There was some feedback from international students demonstrating displeasure for the cost of tuition



fees, in comparison to costs for home students. Furthermore, some felt that this was worsened by the fact that they needed more support with their coursework. There were five comments asking for more cultural celebration events.

Feedback from students with disabilities showed that it should be easier to access help in the first place and that it would be appreciated if extenuating circumstances reverted back to two weeks. Other comments showed that students would like a dedicated allocation of funding for students with disabilities and that a social model of disability should be adopted. It was clear that some students with disabilities felt unfairly treated and that there is a wish for the university's accessibility to be reviewed, including adapting lectures (captions) and adding facilities (sensory rooms).

There were 24 comments requesting more dedicated support for mature students, with many feeling that most support was allocated and geared towards younger students. The suggestions included more financial support for families, allocation of Wednesday afternoons for support, and more information about existing postgraduate services on offer. Postgraduate students demonstrated an appreciation for the representation of their interests, through the VP Postgraduate position in the Students' Union.



Focus Groups

As previously mentioned, it was decided that focus groups should be facilitated to delve further into the topics of Strike Action and the Cost of Living, comments about which are particularly prevalent in this year's Speak Week. In total, four focus groups were run – two on each topic – with each consisting of approximately ten paid student participants. The focus groups ran on Thursday 2 and Friday 3 February. This section will relay the key responses from both sets of each focus group. Both focus groups were an hour long and the participants discussed seven main questions.

Cost of Living Focus Groups

There were eleven students that participated in the first focus group on the Cost of Living and nine in the second. This section will review the responses to the seven questions from both focus groups (referred to as Focus Group 1 and Focus Group 2).

Question 1: What information did you receive about the Cost-of-Living crisis and the possible impact on your student experience, at the start of the academic year? Where did this information come from?

Students had a mixture of responses on where their information had come from. Some students commented on limited communication from the University and Students' Union, and others spoke about how they had gained most of their knowledge from media outlets and government websites. There was no clear common source of information amongst either set of groups.

Question 2: On a scale of 1-10, how aware/concerned have you been about money this academic year?

Over both focus groups, no student responded to the question below a 6, with the average response being an 8, demonstrating that students have been notably concerned about money during this



academic year. In Focus Group 1, all participants agreed that the situation was getting worse, and students who felt that they had planned and budgeted appropriately shared a sentiment of hopelessness towards the situation.

Question 3: How, if at all, has the Cost-of-Living crisis impacted your student experience this academic year?

Nearly all participants responded to say that they had been forced to make difficult decisions, due to the cost of living, with some referring to its negative impact on their mental health and their student experience. Students spoke about the direct impacts of the cost of living on their student experience, such as the reduction of social activities like going out, in addition to indirect factors, such as the impact of strikes. Some individuals indicated that they were unable to join all the social groups (such as societies and sports clubs) that they may have liked to, due to the costs.

Question 4: Has the Cost-of-Living crisis made you reconsider choices relating to your university experience, whether academic or social, and if so, how?

Overwhelmingly, students responded to say that the crisis had made them reconsider their choices. Many students responded to say that they had made significant changes to their diets and are making choices to buy cheaper essential items. Students responded to say that they were eating and drinking out less than they would have expected to. There was a particular focus on first year students and an agreement amongst the groups that the impact is greater for them, as they would traditionally be participating the most in social activities.

Question 5: What is the University/Students' Union currently doing that is supporting you during the Cost-of-Living crisis?

Students discussed that the University do provide bursaries, scholarships, and funding for those who are eligible, but did comment on its limitations. Students appreciated the Students' Union's initiatives



such as 'Feed Your Flat' and the £2 lunches. Moreover, 24-hour spaces, such as the Students' Union's lounge, were appreciated as they allowed for a warm space to stay in that was safe and versatile.

Question 6: What worries do you have about the Cost-of-Living crisis moving forward?

Students from Focus Group 1 discussed that attending university will become even more of a privilege, which will worsen job prospects and further create a class divide. On the other hand, Focus Group 2 discussed the potential impacts of the crisis on their university experience, including potential grades, accommodation quality and costs, and increasing the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Question 7: In an ideal world, what support would you like to see for students to help relieve the worry surrounding the Cost-of-Living crisis?

Generally, students want more funding opportunities, namely bursaries and scholarships. However, they also want to be paid more for their part-time jobs, have more job opportunities, see a reduction in costs, and see better publicity of existing schemes that are there to support students. Moreover, they also said that they would like to see the introduction of a community kitchen in halls of residences to encourage a cost-effective community.



Strike Action Focus Groups

Two focus groups were also run on the topic of Strike Action, each containing nine participants. This section will review the responses to the seven questions from both focus groups (referred to as Focus Group 1 and Focus Group 2).

Question 1: How knowledgeable do you feel about the strike action happening at the moment?

Knowledge about the industrial action amongst students was limited. Whilst some were more knowledgeable from their personal research, there was a consensus that communication from the University had been limited. There was uncertainty amongst students about how the strikes might affect their degrees and whether they needed to be present for classes.

Question 2: How well do you think information about strike action has been communicated to you? Has this allowed you to consider this regarding your own academic experience?

Participants acknowledged that, whilst information regarding industrial action is communicated regularly over email, it is usually vague and does not help to reassure them about the academic impact of the strikes. Amongst international students, there was an additional fear that visa requirements might not be satisfied. Students were generally unsure of whether they needed to attend university on strike days.

Question 3: How would you describe your general opinions and feelings of the strike action?

There was near universal support for the strikes amongst participants. There was a feeling of resentment for the occurrence of strikes, rather than for those participating in the strikes. Some students spoke about how they do not feel like a priority for the university and are not receiving good value for money. This feeling was especially strong amongst international students who pay more in



tuition fees than home students and worsened by the Cost-of-Living crisis. Most students demonstrated a desire for the demands to be met, whilst only a few students wanted to be more informed before supporting the lecturers.

Question 4: Can you think of any reasons staff may be striking, and do you agree with these reasons?

Collectively, participants were able to identify many of the overarching issues that underpin the industrial action, including poor working conditions, disputes over pay, pension deficits and precarious contracts. Some students commented on how this was a nationwide, and not just a local, issue. Many students shared a belief that the strikes were made worse by the Cost-of-Living crisis.

Question 5: Do you have any particular worries about the strike action?

The main concerns focused on potential lost content, which could lead to gaps in knowledge, potential delays in receiving degree awards, and not performing as well as they would like to. Students fear that these potential consequences could impact their job prospects. When asked to score worries about the strike action from 1-10, an average score of 6 was produced.

Question 6: Are you aware of any process to communicate with the university via strike action?

In general, students were unaware of how to communicate with the university about strike action. Additionally, some students demonstrated a lack of desire to do so. Some students commented that they would not want to risk undermining the strikes, whilst others suggested that complaining would not be worthwhile and would not achieve anything.

Question 7: From your perspective, what is the impact of strike action?

Students acknowledged that because union members are unhappy with the current conditions,



intentional disruption is going to be created to impact on as much as possible. Students also mentioned that strikes could impact on the university's reputation. Some doubts were cast on whether the strikes would be successful, and agreements could be reached, but this was contrasted with optimism amongst others.

Summary

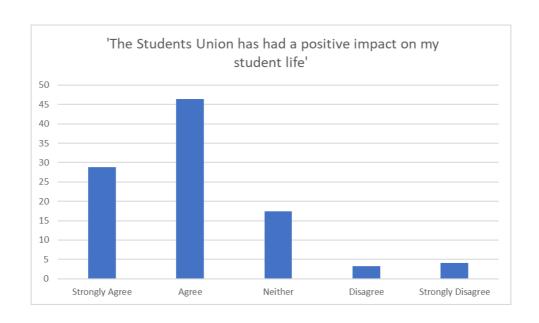
The focus groups provided a valuable insight into the student perspective of the cost of living and strike action. In general, it appeared that students were more concerned about the cost of living than the impact of strike action. Focus group participants within the cost-of-living focus groups averaged an 8 when asked how concerned they were about money but averaged a 6 when asked how concerned they were about the impact of strike action. In both focus groups, however, there was a collective feeling of hopelessness amongst students. Students would like to see more support in terms of bursaries and scholarships to aid with the cost of living. There was a feeling amongst many that the impacts of strike action were worsened by the cost-of-living crisis. However, the majority of students demonstrated support for their lecturers who were striking.

The Students' Union's Impact on Student Life

Students were asked to select one of five options in response to the following statement:

'The Students' Union has had a positive impact on my student life'

Graph 6:



[Combined results from both Speak Weeks: Strongly Agree - 29.4%; Agree - 47.2%; Neither - 16.5%; Disagree - 2.8%; Strongly Disagree - 4.2%]

Overall, 76.6% of students responded to the question stating that they either 'Strongly Agree' or 'Agree' and 7% of students responded stating that they either 'Disagree' or 'Strongly Disagree'. Whilst this is disappointingly lower than the results from last year (81.4% and 6.2%, respectively), some positives can be taken from the improvement in results from Speak Week 1 (November 2022) and Speak Week 2 (January 2023). During Speak Week 1, 75.3% of students responded to say that they

either 'Strongly Agree' or 'Agree' and 7.3% responded to say that they either 'Disagree' or 'Strongly Disagree'. However, in Speak Week 2, 80.0% of students responded with 'Strongly Agree' or 'Agree' and 5.9% responded with 'Disagree' or 'Strongly Disagree'. Thus, from Speak Week 1 to Speak Week 2, there was an increase of 4.7% of students strongly agreeing or agreeing with the statement and a reduction of 1.4% of students disagreeing or strongly disagreeing, with Speak Week 2 providing very similar results to last year's Speak Week.



Conclusion

The 2022-2023 Speak Week campaign demonstrated appreciation amongst Cardiff University students for the opportunities, facilities, and support that they have across the university and Students' Union. However, an overarching theme emerges, as students want to see more of what already exists. This is perhaps an unsurprising perspective due to the growth in size of Cardiff University over the past years.

There was, in particular, a demand for more study spaces, with longer opening hours. Moreover, students were appreciative of the events on offer to them but wanted to see more events, especially non-alcoholic events, including academic social events. Communication was identified as an area for improvement for both the University and Students' Union, with students saying that messages can be at times unclear, leaving them unsure of what information is or is not relevant to them. Students commented that the support systems in place are essential but provide an insufficient service to the number of students in need.

Notably, students felt that the University could have done better with releasing their timetables with many students commenting on their delayed arrival and issues with accuracy. Students expressed a desire for the Extenuating Circumstances procedure to revert to a two-week extension. Students largely demonstrated support and sympathy for their lecturers who were striking, citing the impacts of the Cost-of-Living crisis, and stated that they would appreciate more financial support themselves in the forms of scholarships and bursaries.

This report, as well as specific feedback provided by students as part of the Speak Week campaign, will be reviewed by the Sabbatical Officers for use as part of their campaign priorities.



Appendix 1: School Summaries

College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

CARBS

CARBS students provided 156 comments with 47% of these from students in their 1st year of study (Year 1=73, Year 2=38, Year 3=20, Year 4=16, N/A=8). The split was very even between Undergrads and Postgrads (Undergraduates (UG)=83 Comments Postgraduates (PG)=73 Comments).

The dominant themes were course-related and on student support, study spaces, and the cost of living.

The study spaces were generally praised. Some students suggested improvements in facilities, including more heating, food and drink making facilities, and more seating, especially in the course specific buildings.

Some students requested that lectures be more structured and follow their schedules. Specific lecturers received positive feedback.

The need to support students in academic and financial terms was raised; students were pleased with past initiatives but would like more. Additionally, some students believed the amount of help on offer for disabled students and student carers should be revised.

ENCAP

ENCAP students provided a total of 234 Speak Week Comments, 90% of which came from Undergraduate Students. The highest contributing year group were students in their first year of study (1st Year=108, 2nd Year=62, 3rd Year=39, 4th Year=6, 5+ Year=9, N/A=10).



The themes that appeared the most were relating to individual courses and student support. Students wanted better facilities in lecture theaters. For example, students wanted more plug sockets in the John Percival Building.

The feedback regarding the teaching was generally supportive. However, some students felt that communication between school and lecturers should be better. The design of seminars and lectures is something that students indicated they enjoy. Students find discussion opportunities during seminars effective.

Many students stated they need more support to prepare for exams and assessments, and some said it starts early enough. Some students have commented that assessments need to be more inclusive.

Students wanted to see more support in terms of the cost of living, as resources needed to study are expensive and some are unable to afford them.

GEOPL

GEOPL students provided 26 comments in total (Undergraduates: 21; Postgraduates: 5) Comments were spread evenly throughout the year groups (1st Year= 7, 2nd Year= 8, 3rd Year=7, 4th Year=2, n/a=2).

GEOPL has received positive feedback, with one student commenting that the 'department is wonderful.'

The most common themes were regarding support services and facilities. Some students wanted better student support and resources. This included more academic support, such as essay writing tutorials, in addition to more wellbeing support.

JOMEC



JOMEC students returned 34 Speak Week Cards (28 from UGs; 6 by PGs). These comments were mostly from 1st and 3rd years, accounting for 44% each (1st Year=15, 2nd Year=3, 3rd Year=15, 4th Year=1).

The main theme was student support, followed by feedback on the courses.

Students felt that transport to the JOMEC building should be better, especially for students living in halls.

Students showed appreciation for the wellbeing and academic support but said there needs to be more. The real-life theory behind the teaching is appreciated, and students commented that they enjoy in-person learning as it makes them feel as if they're getting more for their fees. There was positive feedback about lecturers.

Student's Union activities and GIAGs were very well-received by JOMEC students.

LAWPL

LAWPL students returned 177 Speak Week cards, almost entirely by UGs who contributed 94% of the comments. (UGs=165, PGs=3, N/As=9) The comments were equally split between the year groups of 1 to 3; however, students in years 4 or 5+ only contributed 4% of comments. (1st Year=58, 2nd Year=45, 3rd Year=51, 4th Year=5, 5th Year+=2, N/A=19)

The themes that appeared predominantly were relevant to student support, facilities and specific courses.

Students really appreciated the resources on offer. However, some said that lecturers' content should be more specific and informative, especially in seminars. There was positive feedback towards staff, particularly Law staff. Students said they want lectures to be recorded. They did not understand why they are not recorded as they allow students to catch up if ill. Some students have highlighted the



need for better support for disabled students.

The support for students was appreciated; however, many felt that there should be more. Students wanted to see the Law infrastructure and buildings updated. They wanted more adequate study areas as the common ones are very busy.

Students expressed a wish to see more cost-of-living events, such as 'Feed Your Flat' or free tea and drinks at communal areas. Some have said that timetabling should be done with more time before the start of term. The online library resources were cited as very helpful, but some felt that the search function should be better designed.

Some students have voiced that staff deserve adequate pay, so they do not have to strike, which impedes students' education and decreases the value for money of the fees.

Students appreciated the resources provided academically and for their wellbeing, but would like them to be better organised, communicated, and funded better, so they provide the best possible service to those that need the support.

MLANG

102 Speak Week cards were collected from MLANG students. Virtually all comments were from UG students (UG:100; PG:1; No data:1). The breakdown by year is as follows: Year 1=44 (43%), Year 2=16 (16%), Year 3=9 (9%), Year 4=26 (25%), Year 5+=1(1%), N/A=6 (6%).

Students praised Student Union societies, events and GIAG trips.

There was also a lot of praise for how the course was being run, including praise for personal tutors and for the quality of teaching. However, some students felt that lecture/seminar length did need to be extended from 45 mins to 1hr. Students also wanted more contact hours in general.



The general cost of living/societies/tuition did get mentioned regularly. A few accommodation issues were raised too, such as mouldy rooms, and the need for help offering accommodation for students who study one semester (ERASMUS students).

MUSIC

7 students from MUSIC gave their responses for speak week. All but one were UG students. Broken down by year group, this is shown by Year 1 = 1, Year 2=0, Year 3=5, Year 4=1.

Some students commented on the impact of the cost of living, strikes and accountability.

There was strong support from one student to bring back the music library. There were also passionate views on moving Wednesday afternoon lectures. Students wanted to see increased study spaces and access to book rooms for study.

SHARE

There were 214 comments provided from SHARE students. These were largely provided by UGs (76%) over PGs (24%). These predominantly came from 1st and 2nd years (1st Year: 34% 2nd Year: 37% 3rd Year: 15% 4th Year: 7%, Year 5+: 2%, N/A: 5%).

The dominant themes were regarding the facilities, cost of living, specific courses, student support and staff pay.

There was a desire for extra spaces in the John Percival building, specifically quiet ones and better facilities (kettle).

In person teaching and lectures were positively commented on, some preferred in person, some preferred blended, but the recordings were good. However, a handful of students have called for all slides to be uploaded on Learning Central before lectures. Students stated how there has been a high



teaching standard throughout courses. Various students specified how good the Conservation Conversion Course and its lecturer is. There were calls for that course to be acknowledged and better promoted. In addition, SHARE students praise the library staff as friendly and helpful. Students agreed that staff deserve higher pay.

Students had some positive feedback towards online exams, but a lot of students called for Extenuating Circumstances to revert to two weeks. There was a call for more student support, specifically regarding the cost-of-living crisis and accommodation after 1st year.

Joint-honours students wanted better cross-departmental communications. One student mentor stated how they enjoy the role and would like to see more student led activities. However, another student said that student mentors should be more committed. Students were supportive of Student Academic Reps and appreciated the work they do. There was a desire for more Student Academic Rep events (like the gathering in 2019). One said how they would be willing to help more, such as volunteering during Speak Week, etc.

<u>SOCSI</u>

SOCSI students provided 100 comments during Speak Week. Of these, 45% were from students in their 1st Year (19% were from 2nd Years, 16% from 3rd Years, 7% from 4th Years, 3% from 5+ Years, and 10% had no data). These were largely by UGs that provided 74% of the comments with 26% by PGs

The themes predominant among the feedback were regarding facilities and study areas, specific courses and student support.

There was a desire for a Social Sciences reading week for all courses. The study spaces were very well liked, especially those which are open 24 hours a day. However, students said they would like more study spaces of these and better facilities within them (kettles, etc.).



Feedback demonstrated that seminars are enjoyed. However, some disagreed, and one student stated how they are often cancelled and need to be organised better. Some students highlighted that it would be beneficial for lecturers to record lectures to aid students in reviewing material.

The support services were greatly appreciated by students (study skills, etc.) but some felt these need to be advertised better. Also, students wanted more support regarding exams and essays and mental health. Similarly, the Cost-of-Living support has been appreciated and cheap food and drink on campus is liked. However, there was a consensus that there should be more support offered.

WELSH

16 comments were provided from WELSH students. 29% of these were from 1st Years, 14% from 2nd, 14% from 3rd Years, and 43% did not have stage data. 57% were from undergraduate students and the other 43% did not have stage data.

The dominant theme was the Welsh language. Students highlighted a need for more Welsh signs around campus, and existing ones needing to be corrected. Also, some felt that the Cardiff logo should have the Welsh text on the top. Some students said that there should be more opportunities to learn in Welsh across modules in all schools and there should also be better ways to live through the Welsh language including a Welsh Students Forum as an opportunity to voice opinions. Similarly, some felt that socialising through Welsh should be encouraged. Additionally, others stated that there need to be more activities done in Welsh and existing ones should be better advertised and supported.

The mentoring scheme received positive feedback. Some students wanted modules to be better organised to relate better to real practices and real-world applications. Additionally, they felt that the organisation of module allocation should be improved to offer students a better chance to study the modules they have an interest in.

College of Biomedical and Life Sciences



BIOSI

In total there were 234 comments received from BIOSI students during Speak Week.

These were given by mostly undergraduates, making up 89% of comments. The comments were fairly evenly split throughout the year groups with students in their third year being the most present (Year 1=56, Year 2=46, Year 3=72, Year 4=32, Year 5+=15, N/A=13). The least represented group was PGT students who only provided 4 comments (PGR=21, PGT=4)

The most common themes were the cost-of-living crisis, study spaces, and specific course comments. Many students commented on the Mental Health support on offer and the need for its improvement.

The design of modules was often referred to, with some students mentioning the need to improve or rethink the Stem Cell and Cell Biology modules. However, the Anatomy module and seminars were praised. Additionally, specific lecturers also received positive feedback.

The facilities were praised, with one student specifically praising the screens in the eLEAF and labs that support learning. Students appreciated the variety of study spaces on offer, even if they are often busy.

The overall workload was criticised, and the lack of support to students adjusting was mentioned. The recordings of lectures were a key thing students want to keep. Numerous students commented on the need to return Extenuating Circumstances to 14 days.

DENTL

A total of 16 comments were received, all from Undergraduate students (1st Year=7, 2nd Year=6, 3rd Year=3).



The most visible theme was regarding study spaces, including a desire for more space, better WiFi, kitchen facilities and free printing.

Some students voiced the opinion that the organisation of the school should be improved. The support systems, such as the buddy system, were praised; however, numerous students noted how they do not enjoy the high requirement to teach themselves, which they feel is not helped by the amount of online learning. Whilst some felt that there is too much, some students commented that they enjoy the split of teaching (in-person and online).

HCARE

HCARE students returned 105 Speak Week cards (1st Years: 62%, 2nd Years: 28%, and 3rd Years: 6%, no data: 4%). Cards were predominantly returned from UG students (93), with PG students returning 12.

The majority of comments were regarding the course or facilities at the school.

Some comments were about the organisation of lectures. A few students felt that 3-hour lectures are too long and impedes their ability to focus.

The teaching style was supported, and students said they enjoyed the workshops. Some students preferred the blended learning approach, whereas others did not. However, there was a consensus that communication between lecturers and students should be better, especially regarding the cancellation of lectures. Some students travel far to campus and so felt like it was a waste of their time when a lecture had been cancelled but they had not been told.

There was a desire for better inclusivity and connection between the Heath and Cathays campuses. It was suggested this could be through events held at Heath or Transport between the two. Some students felt left out if they are based at Heath. The facilities and social areas at Heath were very popular. Students wanted to see a greater presence of student support services at the Heath, as



many felt that it is not fair to expect students based there to go to the Cathays campus.

Students wanted study spaces and libraries to be open 24hrs, and there were comments about a need for more group study spaces in the Cochrane Building. Some students felt that placements in Healthcare should be paid, especially given the cost-of-living crisis.

MEDIC

From MEDIC students, a total of 278 comments were collated of which 261 respondents were UG (94%), 17 were PG (6%). The split by year group was: Year 1=111 (40%), Year 2=64 (23%), Year 3=35 (13%), Year 4=23 (8%), Year 5+=5 (2%), No data =18 (6%).

Students demonstrated an appreciation for the Taf, university libraries and Students' Union societies.

In terms of course-relevant comments, several students wanted self-directed learning. Additionally, they wanted recorded lectures to stay and increase in quantity.

MEDIC students also requested better adjustments for quality of life, including fewer 9am lectures, more time to learn examinable content, and a reading week. Many students requested more professional, wellbeing, and academic support.

OPTOM

In total, 17 Speak Week cards were returned from OPTOM students. These were evenly split among study years (Year 1: 4, Year 2: 4, Year 3: 6, N/A: 1).

The most common theme was the cost-of-living crisis. There was also feedback regarding specific courses and study areas/facilities. The facilities received positive feedback; however, one student suggested that free tea and coffee would be a good addition.



One student commented on the need for specific student ambassadors for more obscure courses, as potential applicants may not be aware of their options. Finally, one student suggested that practical time in clinics should be reviewed.

PHRMY

There was a total of 33 Speak Week cards from PHRMY students. 73% of which were from UGs and 27% from PGs. These comments were predominantly from Year 1s (52%), followed by Year 4s that provided about a fifth of all comments (21%). Students from Years 2 and 3 were not as well-represented (12% and 3% respectively) and 12% of the comments had no year data.

The dominant theme was academic feedback. Numerous students provided positive feedback on the quality of the lectures. There were numerous comments referring to how individuals prefer in-person over recorded lectures. However, one student did state how the option of both would be beneficial. A specific lecturer received praise, though one PhD student requested more Psychology lectures.

The facilities were praised, however more plug sockets would be welcomed, and students requested better toilet cleanliness.

PSYCH

PSYCH students provided 206 comments during Speak Week. These comments were predominantly from students in their second and first years (Year 1: 34% Year 2: 36% Year 3: 10%, Year 4: 8%, Year 5+: 1% N/A: 11%). The comments were provided by mostly UGs (88%) with PGs providing only 11%. 1% did not have any UG/PG data.

The dominant theme was relating to feedback on teaching and specific courses. The other themes that appeared regularly were assessments, the cost of living, facilities, student support and reading weeks.



Tutor Groups received good feedback. It was felt they are an effective support system and encouraged students to make friends. The lecturers were said to be supportive, and two lecturers received praise. The teaching and course received good feedback. Some students suggested that statistics teaching could be more supportive, or a reorganisation of how it is taught through the years would ease the workload.

Student placements fees are seen too high, especially when a student is unpaid. Some feel that the department is often disorganised, especially regarding the implementation of a new module (neuroimaging).

Various students commented on the dissertation topics, saying that the choice was limited, and the allocation process should be reviewed to offer students a better chance of receiving their first choice.

The reading week was appreciated; however, some students felt the reading lists should be discussed more and there should be better support for assignments (exams and essays).

College of Physical Sciences and Engineering

<u>ARCHI</u>

In total, 23 Speak Week cards were returned by ARCHI students. Of those returned, approximately seventy percent were returned by students in their first year of study at Cardiff University (Year1:16; Year 2:3; Year 3:1; Yeah 4:2; N/A:2). However, there was an even split between UG (13:57%) and PGT (10:43%).

In general, there was a lot of encouraging feedback, with students leaving positive comments about the ARCHI building – positive feedback on having their own building and study space, unlike all schools. Furthermore, ARCHI staff and their lectures received praise.

Other students felt that some lectures could be made more relevant at times, and one student said



that lecture punctuality could be improved. A few students commented that they would like to receive more support from their personal and academic tutors and would like the course to be more structured. One student commented that accessibility could be improved, regarding social media stories, closed captions on lecture recordings, more quiet spaces and guidance on them, and a car parking phone.

Regarding post-university employment, one student commented that they would like to keep the employment fairs; however, another student said that they would like more guidance on employment.

CHEMY

The majority of cards were returned from Undergraduates (80%). These comments were split evenly throughout the year groups (Year 1=9, Year 2=10, Year 3=13, Year 4=11, Year 5+=4, N/A=3)

Student support and study spaces were the dominant themes.

One student specifically praised all core modules, however explained that the labs require better management and better facilities. Additionally, another student said that often items are contaminated or don't properly operate, resulting in a student's grade being affected.

The timetabling of lectures was highlighted as an area for improvement. However, many students agreed that the course has many benefits, such as good lecturers and tutorials. The need for a reading week for science courses was stated by a few students.

Students praised the cost-of-living initiatives but agreed that further support schemes are needed.

COMSC

COMSC students provided 105 Speak Week comments provided with 65% coming from Undergraduates (UG=68, PG=32, N/A=5). These were mainly by 1st and 2nd year students, who



provided over 70% of the comments (Year 1=35, Year 2=38, Year 3=14, Year 4=7).

The dominant themes included course-specific feedback, in addition to student support and study spaces.

The study spaces were praised; however, some students have said that there needs to be more seating. Students enjoyed the labs and classes but wanted more in-person support. Some students commented that the recorded videos are not an adequate replacement for in-person teaching, as they felt the courses were hands-on and as such require in-person teaching. Some students did complain about the teaching quality and Learning Central.

Additionally, one student commented that the school should offer free period products in the toilets.

EARTH

EARTH Students provided 130 comments, predominantly from Undergraduate students (only 3 came from Postgraduates). Students in their third year of study submitted nearly half the comments. (1st Year=27, 2nd Year=22, 3rd Year=63, 4th Year=2, N/A=16).

The dominant themes were regarding student support, study spaces, the courses and the cost of living.

There was a strong desire for more student support, both academic and personal (mental health).

Some students commented on the teaching style. One student said there is some confusion over content, saying that they are sometimes unsure on what content they need to learn from lectures and what is additional. The topics were praised but students stated a need for better inclusivity, regarding support, assessments, teaching and generally.

ENGIN



240 cards were returned, mostly provided by Undergraduates (UG=223, PG=13, N/A=4). Second year students commented the most, though the split was fairly even (Year 1=27, Year 2=76, Year3 =55, Year 4=49, Year 5+=27, N/A=6).

The most predominant themes mentioned were regarding the courses, the facilities, student support and study spaces.

The academic support and resources provided are appreciated by students; some students would like further support. Students appreciated resources that lecturers design to help them with their assessments. Some students felt like they could have a better relationship with the school and their tutors; one student said communication can feel impersonal at times. Some students felt like the modules could be better organised. Additionally, they preferred in-person lectures over online, and some would like timetabling changes and increased contact hours.

Facilities in the school were appreciated, including seperate bins for recycling. Many students said that the canteen and study spaces are amazing.

MATHS

MATHS students returned a total of 28 Speak Week cards. 17 respondents were UG (61%); 11 were PG (39%). Year 1=17 (61%), Year 2=5 (18%), Year 3=1 (4%), Year 4=2 (7%), No data =3 (10%).

Study areas received praise. However, students highlighted that more spaces are needed (in particular ABACWS, and when CSL floors are closed off). Some students believed that Maths support should be improved, including quicker response times and a dedicated room for Maths help (rather than a table in the CSL).

Outside of course-based feedback, students wanted to see improvements to accommodation (e.g. University halls bus and circuit laundry and facilities improvements).



PHYSX

26 cards were returned from PHYSX students. These comments were predominantly from second years (50%) followed by first years (31%) then third years (11%) and finally fourth years (8%). 65% of these were UGs and 35% PGs.

The dominant theme was regarding specific teaching and courses. The online learning videos/resources were praised as an addition to in-person lectures. Some students did say how they prefer the in-person lectures to online lectures, but many felt it would be beneficial to record lectures and put them online too.

Two students raised that they do not feel comfortable asking questions or for support. The programming module was highlighted by one student as an area to improve, although another student noted how the return to in-person teaching has helped with this module.

Some students highlighted that the Trevithick building does not have brilliant WIFI access. Students felt that timetables could be provided earlier to allow for future planning.

